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ABSTRACT

Some aspects of foreign language classroom discourse are examined from a social theoretical perspective, and an attempt to raise the learners' awareness of the social reality created in interaction with other learners in the foreign language being taught is described. Through peer observation and the retrospective evaluation by the participants of interaction patterns in group discussions, three aspects are examined: the turn-taking mechanism, the management of topics, and repair patterns. The subjects were three groups of seven undergraduate students in a fourth semester German course participating in a task-oriented discussion in the absence of a teacher on the second day of the fall term. In each group, three students were observers and four were participants, and all responded to questionnaires after the discussion. The results suggest that adult learners at this level can observe and evaluate their interaction in group work, and the interactional metalanguage in the second language seems to be linguistically accessible to them, permitting a process-oriented discussion. However, the learners' ability to focus on process seems determined by the amount of control they perceive themselves to have over the group's discourse. It is suggested that this ability to reflect on interactional features could be helpful to students in (1) viewing their own performance in light of short- or long-term, explicit or implicit goals set for themselves; (2) reducing anxiety by qualitative differentiation of tasks and functions in discourse; and (3) broadening learners' options in group work through comparison with peers. (MSE)

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Interaction Processes in Group Work

Claire J. Kramsch

Paper presented at the TESOL Convention
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Interaction Processes in Group Work

Claire J. Kramsch, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

This paper takes a social theoretical view of some aspects of classroom discourse and describes an attempt to raise the learners' awareness of the social reality they create when they interact with other learners in the foreign language. Through peer observation and the retrospective evaluation by the participants of interaction patterns in group discussions, three aspects are examined: the turn-taking mechanism, the management of topics, the repair patterns. The multiple perspective thus obtained dramatizes the discrepancies in the assumptions, perceptions and goals of each participant. The results of this study suggest that an explicit discussion of the interaction processes in group talk may help learners diversify their goals, differentiate between several discourse functions and broaden their learning options.

Psycholinguistic research has stressed recently the benefits that learners can draw from conversing with one another in the language classroom (Long, 1983; Porter, 1983; Varonis and Gass, 1983; Long and Porter, 1984; Doughty and Pica, 1984). It is argued that by learning to interact with one another, non-native speakers activate communication skills that prepare them to use the language in natural settings and thereby acquire the forms of the language (Allwright, 1984). Through conversing with their peers, learners receive more comprehensible input (Seliger, 1983) and are forced to produce more comprehensible output (Swain, 1983). Having to control the turn-taking mechanism characteristic of natural discourse, they become intrinsically motivated to listen to other speakers (van Lier, 1982). Learners are also much more active in negotiating message meaning (Doughty and Pica, 1984) and in repairing their errors (Porter, 1983) when talking to other

non-native speakers than when talking to the teacher. Psycholinguistic research thus seems to support the view that learners can acquire many elements of communicative competence by interacting with other learners, e.g., in small group work.

However, the social reality of the classroom can make such group work difficult. The benefits are often shortchanged by the perceptions, experiences and expectationsof the participants. Learners in peer conversations may feel at the mercy of other, possibly more proficient participants; less skillful learners feel unable to control and manage the topic of the conversation; they perceive their major source of trouble to be a linguistic deficiency, and they are not even aware of having problems in the interactive structure of the discourse (Kramsch, 1981). In ESL classes, cultural differences in discourse management can lead to tensions and misunderstandings that reinforce cultural stereotypes and impede communication (Tannen, 1979; Gumperz, 1983). Learners' expectations of roles and tasks in classrooms can counteract the benefits of group work.

Taking a social theoretical rather than a psycholinguistic viewpoint (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Schein, 1969; Goffman, 1981; Bales, 1951; Bales and Cohen, 1979; Mehan, 1979; Erickson, 1981), we can consider language learning in peer groups as the construction of a social reality in which discursive roles and tasks are not fixed once and for all, but have to be determined by the participants.

Using Schein's (1969) categories, we can distinguish four separate social roles which group members have to act out by fulfilling certain interactional functions:

1) As individuals, learners have to achieve a number of individual tasks to improve their knowledge of the language: identify words and attribute meanings, make relevant contributions, form grammatically and lexically acceptable utterances. Individual task functions are, for example: listen, make sense, check understanding, give information, express opinions, correct errors.

2) Learners also have to achieve together a given group task (problem-solving exercise, simulation game, discussion of a text etc.), in order to improve their ability to communicate with one another in the language. Group task functions include: initiate turns, seek and give opinions, seek and give information, clarify, comment, elaborate on other's ideas, summarize, review what has been said. In frontally taught classes, group task functions are usually the responsibility of the teacher; in group work, these tasks have to be negotiated.

3) As individuals, learners have to define their place and their role within the group. For this, they have to fulfill such individual maintenance functions as: choose their role within the group (the initiator, the challenger, the quiet listener, the helper) for each of the group's activities; determine how much control and influence they want to have; how much they can get, and in which aspects of the group's activity; decide how to fulfill their own individual needs while pursuing the group's objectives.

4) As group members, learners have to help maintain group cohesion, by fulfilling group maintenance functions: make procedural remarks on the way the discussion is conducted; elaborate on/refer to what others have said; give feedback to others; help with language difficulties; elicit participation ("gate-keeping"). Group maintenance functions are not generally expected of learners in traditional classrooms. Group work implies a change of roles which is often disconcerting to learners.

If many of the difficulties encountered by learners are interactional in nature, explicit attention to interaction processes should be the first step in learning to construct discourse. Thus, the suggestion has been made that metacommunicative reflexion should be part of the communicative activities of the classroom. Breen and Candlin (1980:106) stress the need for communication-about-learning or "formative evaluation" by the learners. More recently, Candlin (1984) argues that the ability of participants to change

the context of their discourse is related to their ability to reflect on the forces operating within the social situation in which that discourse takes place. It seems that the formal, conscious learning that Long (1983) recently showed to be the indispensable supplement to the informal acquisition process (Krashen, 1976) need not be applied only to the linguistic structures; it can also be used to give the learners greater control over their own and others' discourse behavior (Berger, 1979:127).

The following will describe a pilot study conducted to test the feasibility of metacommunicative learning in the classroom. Three questions were to be addressed: (1) to what extent are learners capable of evaluating their and others' patterns of participation in group interaction; (2) are they able to discuss these in the target language; (3) what are the possible benefits of such metacommunicative evaluations.

Method

Three groups of seven American undergraduates from a fourth semester German class selected themselves at random to be participants or observers in a 15 minute task-oriented discussion, in the absence of the teacher, on the second day of the fall term. They did not know each other and had varying degrees of linguistic proficiency, as is often the case in fourth semester college foreign language classes.

The assigned topic was the distribution of the national budget in a fictitious developing country named Zimbako, where oil had just been discovered. How should the country spend its money: on education ? on electricity ? industrial development ?[1] Participants had to negotiate and reach a common decision by expressing

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[1] Taken from George Rooks, The Non-Stop Discussion Workbook, Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1981.

and exchanging various opinions on the topic. There were four participants and three observers per group. During the discussion, observer 1 noted the turn-taking mechanism, observer 2 the management of the topics, observer 3 the repair of errors and breakdowns in communication. After the discussion, participants were asked to assess their participation and that of the other members of the group.

Listed below are the various functions that participants were asked to consider. The 11 verbal functions (6 task functions, 5 group maintenance functions) were inspired by the categories established by Bales (1979) for the systematic multiple-level observation of groups. The non-verbal functions are variations on the notion of listener's "footing" discussed by Goffman (1981:124-159).

- Insert"Participant's Questionnaire: List of Functions" here -

The observers' codings and the retrospective ratings by each of the participants were then compared and discussed in a debriefing session conducted in the foreign language[2].

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[2] A similar activity had been conducted the day before in English. The students were therefore familiar with the metalanguage used. The activity described here was conducted the second day, using the target language both for the observation sheets and for the ensuing debriefing session.

Turn-Taking

Eugen, Phil, Sue and Tom are second-year college students of German. They are discussing in the absence of the teacher the distribution of the budget in a fictitious country, Zimbako, where oil has just been discovered. Here is a five minute sample of their discussion.

E. ja das (1")
S. oder
P. das ist wahr das ist wahr (1")
T. ich glaube daß die Bildungswesen und ah die Sozialprogramme sind die wichs wichs wichtiger
P. aber auch die Industrie und Tourismus sind ah sehr wichtig, denn sie bringen ah Geld in das in das Land (4")
S. ja und auch einige Programme brauchen viel viel Geld im beginning und später nicht so viel und wie ah die Künste und Freizeitgestaltung sind nicht so (3")
E. aber Landwirtschaft, das muß wichtig sein (3") das ist doch Unternährung und es ist hart zu lernen, ob ah du nichts zu essen hast
P. ah ein Moment, wir haben ah 40 Milliarden D-Mark und nur eine Million mehr ah Leute, dafür hat jede Leute jede Person hat mehr als ah na na
E. das ist nicht das ist nicht viel
P. das ist nicht so viel (9")
E. aber Tourismus ah das ist leicht zu ah leicht Geld zu verdienen die Tourist (S:j...)ah
S. ja aber das ist nicht die Sache, nur Hotelen hm zu bauen weil man niemand kennt die diese diese Zimbako
E. [aber das
S. [das ist für neue
T. ich ich glaube
S. das ist für andere.
T. ich glaube ah daß ah zuerst man muß ah die Leute ah (4") healthy (laughs)
P. ja sie [sie können nicht krank sein
T. [wir müssen so so soziale Programme und ah Verkehrswege to ah zu ah eine national (5") you know (1") feeling (1") so that (1") so daß die Leute kann hm besser leben; dann ah dann sollen wir hm andere Ausländer ah bringen ah willkommen.

1 E. yes it (1")
2 S. or
3 P. it's true it's true (1")
4 T. I thinkthat education and ah the social programs are the most most more important
5 P. but also industry and tourism are ah very important because they bring ah money into into the country (4")
6 S. yes and also some programs need a lot a lot of money in the beginning and later not as much and like ah the arts and leisure activities are not so (3")
7 E. but agriculture, that must be important (3") because it is food and it is hard to learn if ah you don't have anything to eat
8 P. but wait a minute, we have 40 billion D-Marks and only one million more ah people, so each people each person has more than ah no no
9 E. it is not it is not much
10 P. it is not that much (9")
11 E. but tourism ah it's easy to ah easy to earn money the tourist (S:y...)ah
12 S. yes but this is not the thing, only to build hotels hm because one no one knows the this this Zimbako
13 E. [but it
. [it is for new
14 T. I I think
15 S. it is for the others.
16 T. I think ah that ah first one must ah the people ah (4") healthy (laughs)
17 P. yes they [they cannot be sick
18 T. [we must ah so so social programs and ah transportation to ah to ah a national (5") you know (1") feeling (1") so that (1") so that the people can hm live better; then ah then we should hm bring ah welcome other foreigners.

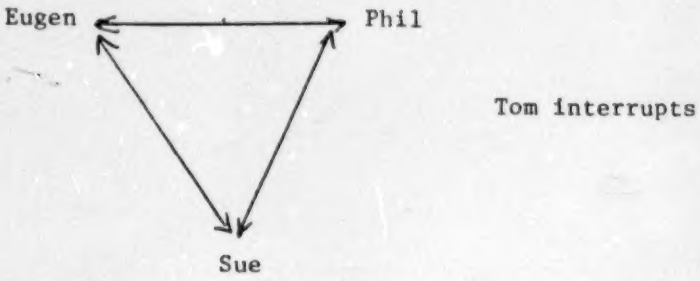
S. ja ich denke daß die Industrie und Technologie undsoweiter ist nicht so <u>important</u> am ersten (P:ja) weil keine Leute in in Zimako ...

19 S. yes I think that industry and technology etcoetera is not so <u>important</u> at first (P:yes) because now because (there are) no people in in Zimbako ...

The sample starts five minutes into the conversation, in which Eugen has already taken 11 turns, Phil 9, Sue 7 and Tom 1. This extract can be considered to be fairly representative of the way in which each participant behaved during the rest of the activity.

Observations

Codings by the observer (see Observation Sheet 1 in Appendix): Observer 1 assessed the whole 15 minute discussion as an interactional triangle between Eugen, Phil and Sue, which Tom interrupted from time to time. He summarized the interaction like this:



He noted that Eugen had taken 38 turns in all, Phil 36, Sue 38, Tom 14. He added that "there were often dialogues", e.g., between Eugen and Phil, Eugen and Sue.

Self-perception and other-perception of the participants was recorded as follows, in response to questions a) through c) on the participants' questionnaire.

- Insert"Participant's Questionnaire: Evaluation" here -

Eugen noted that he had been "provoked" in taking part in the discussion (he did not mention whether he had been provoked by the others or by the topic); he added that he "wanted to bring about results". He was seen by Tom as initiating the discussion, and by Sue as "discussing a lot".

Phil said he "likes to be a moderator or commentator, who listens and understands

and summarizes what others have said, shows other sides of ideas". Eugen saw Phil as "active", Sue thought he "led the discussion, initiated many ideas and spoke a lot", Tom thought he "spoke a lot in the beginning".
Sue remarked of herself: "I answered a lot, I didn't have so many new ideas, but I spoke a lot because I made comments." Phil said of her that "she brought in ideas, comments and built upon others' ideas." Tom said "she spoke a lot." Tom noted of himself: "In the beginning I didn't say much but later I spoke more. I lacked vocabulary. If I wanted to say something, I always had to interrupt. The others monopolized the discussion." Eugen noted that Tom gave comments and showed that he listened. Phil said he gave comments now and then. Sue wrote: "Tom hardly said anything at all, maybe because his vocabulary was not that large. I think he has much to say, but he didn't say it, because he couldn't say it."

Discussion

The observer's coding during the interaction and his overall assessment are remarkably confirmed by an analysis of the turn-taking structure of the passage. After an initial round of comments on the previous topic (turns 1-3), T, P, S and E each nominate their topic in orderly fashion, with turns of almost equal length (turns 4-7) and with up to four minute gaps between turns. Linking to E's turn 7, E and P then enter into a dialogue (EPEP in turns 7-10) followed by another dialogue between E and S (ESES in turns 11, 12, 13 and 15). T tries to break into the dialogue pattern, but only after three attempts (turns 14, 16, 18) is he able to complete a full turn.

The testimonies of Eugen, Phil, Sue and Tom show that the availability of turns depends on the participants' perception of their abilities and goals. In real terms, Tom did not have to interrupt to take a turn (e.g., the long pause at the end of turn 10 offered him a natural completion point to come in), but in perceived terms he felt he had to interrupt, since he was concentrating on his lexical problems, and thus ignored natural entry points. Eugen's goal of

"wanting to bring about results" is reflected in the number of turns he made available for himself, e.g., by initiating turns 7 and 11. Phil's observed tendency to "enter into dialogues" with other members of the group is consistent with his goal of "wanting to be a moderator".

The availability of turns depends also on the behavior of others. It was Sue's responsive behavior to others ("I answered a lot") that encouraged the formation of dialogues, e.g., with Eugen. Phil's way of "showing the other side of ideas" and Sue's comments "provoked" Eugen in taking an active part in the discussion.

Topic Management

Student observer 2 had to note how participants managed the topic under discussion by fulfilling any of the 18 functions listed. We will examine for each participant what was said and how this was coded by the observer. We will then compare it with the self-perceptions and other-perceptions of the same events.

Eugen.

E. Sollen wir anfangen ?	E. shall we begin ?
→ ich glaube daß wir meistens 90% auf die Bildungswesen (12") spendieren sollten	I think that we should (12") spend mostly 90% on education

Sample 2:

P. auch das ist wenn man keine Elektrizität hat kann man nicht studieren und so	P. also it is when one doesn't have electricity one cannot study and so
E. [das ist aus	E. [it is finished
S. [(laughs) ja	S. [(laughs) yes
→ E. aber ich denke das ist nicht mehr als 5 Jahre ah darum sollte bis ah	E. but I think it is no more than 5 years ah that's why we should ah

Sample 3:

P. ich glaube wir müssen etwas zu jede Programm hier geben nicht alles zum Bildungswesen oder alles zum Elektrität aber etwas zu alles (1")	P. I think we must give something to each program here not everything to education or everything to electricity but something to everything (1")
T. wie haben elf Programme (...)	T. we have eleven programs (...)
P. ich glaube auch	P. I think so too
S. ja	S. yes
→ E. welche Programme sollte die wichtigste sein ?	E. which program should be the most important ?

Sample 4:

S. Kunst und Freizeitgestaltung sind nicht so wichtig
P. nicht jetzt
S. nicht jetzt nein [später
P. [später ja aber nicht zuerst
→ E. aber doch, aber doch ! die Kunst ...

S. art and leisure activities are not so important
P. not now
S. not now no [later
P. [later yes but not at first
E. but on the contrary, on the contrary ! the arts ...

Phil.
Sample 5:

→ P. aber wir können nicht alles in die Elektrizitätsprogrammen wenn wir nur Elektrizität haben und keine Eduka-tion
S. ja ja ich
P. [weiß es, das ist warum ich denke daß [wenn die Leute krank sind
S. die Technologie und Industrie nicht jetzt so ...

P. but we cannot (put) everything in the electricity programs, if we have only electricity and no education
S. yes yes [I know it, that is why I
P. [when the people are sick
S. think that technology and industry are not so ...

Sample 6:

S. sie müssen 10 Jahre in die Schule sein ah bevor sie ah arbeiten können
E. [aber ich denke
→ P. [aber das ist 10 Jahre ! zu lang !

S. they must be 10 years in school ah before they ah can work
E. [but I think
P. [but it's 10 years ! too long !

Sample 7:

S. sie wissen kein Mathematik oder keine Physik ich denke oder - sie können nur lesen, das ist nichts (6")
→ P. ich glaube wir müssen etwas zu jede Programm hier geben nicht alles zum Bildungswesen oder alles zum Elektrizität aber etwas zu alle (1")

S. they don't know any math or physics I think or - they can only read, that is nothing (6")
P. I think we must give something to each program, not everything to education or everything to electricity (1")

Sample 8:

S. man kann später sehen was man tun muß , wenn die Öl - was ist das - ausgetrocknet
T. ich glaube das auch
→ P. ja so glaube ich auch, die Sozialprogramme sind die wichtigsten

S. we can see later what we should do when the oil - what's that - dries up
T. I think so too
P. yes that's what I think too, the social programs are the most important

Sample 9:

E. das ist nicht das ist nicht viel
→ P. das ist nicht so viel (9")

E. it is not it is not much
P. it is not that much (9")

Sample 10:

E. dann sollen wir die Prozente (...) diskutieren ?
→ P. ja sollen wir sagen, daß wir hm 70% für diese 5 Programme geben wollen und die andere 30 für die andere ?

E. then should we discuss (...) the percentages ?
P. yes should we say that we want to give hm 70% to these 5 programs and the other 30 to the others ?

Sue.

Sample 11:

→ S. ja und auch die Bildungswesen ist nicht alles und nur in die Schule. Wenn man keine Verbindungen hat ah man hat viel (...)	S. yes and also education is not everygting and only in school. If you don't have transportation ah you have a lot of (...)

Sample 12:

T. mit so viel Geld können wir hm können wir alles anderes tun dann sollen wir Industrie verbessern	T. with so much money we can hm we can we can do everything else then we should improve the industry
→ S. ja ja ich denke so auch immer	S. yes yes I think so too all the time

Thomas.

Sample 13:

S. man kann später sehen was man tun muß wenn die Öl - was ist das - ausgetrocknet	S. we can see later what we must do when the oil - what's that - dries up
→ T. ich glaube das auch	T. I think so too

Sample 14:

→ T. (silence)	T. (silence)

Observations

The observer (see Observation Sheet 2 in Appendix) and the participants (see Participant's Questionnaire above) made the following observations for each group member.

Eugen.

Codings by observer. The lines marked by an arrow were coded as follows. Sample 1 was coded as "giving an opinion", sample 2 as "giving an opinion and interrupting", both illustrations of function 1. In sample 3, the observer coded Eugen's last utterance: "which programs should be the most important ?" as fulfilling function 5 (summarizing), probably because it was going back to the original task. In sample 4, Eugen's last remark was coded by the observer as function 8 ("showing with words that you are listening").

Participants' ratings. The interaction processes relating to Eugen can be schematized as follows:

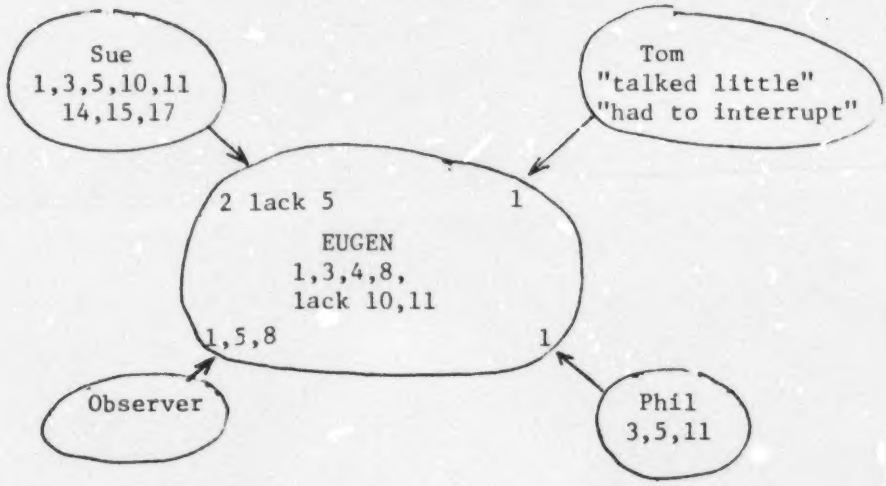


Table 1: Self- and other-perception - Eugen

Table 1 shows Eugen's self-perception and the others' self- and other-perception. Whereas Eugen was coded by the observer as fulfilling functions 1, 5 and 8, he rates himself retrospectively as a 1, 3, 4, 8. In answer to question b) on the participant's questionnaire, he is seen by Phil and Tom as a 1, by Sue as a 2. Sue adds that he lacks function 5. Thus Eugen seems himself pretty much in line with the others' assessment that he fulfills mainly group task functions. Moreover, the group sees in him more an initiator of ideas (functions 1 and 2) than the collaborating group member that he sees himself to be (functions 3, 4, 8). When asked whether he would like to change behavior, he responded he would like to activate for himself functions 10 and 11 (group maintenance functions).

Phil.

Codings by observer. Phil's contributions were coded in the various samples as follows. Sample 5: "thinking out loud" (function 2); sample 6: "making a comment" (function 4); sample 7: "summarizing" (function 5); sample 8: "giving feedback" (function 8); sample 9: "repeating with other words" (function 9); sample 10: "explaining what one has understood" (function 9).

Participants' ratings. The perceptions of Phil's participation can be schematized as follows.

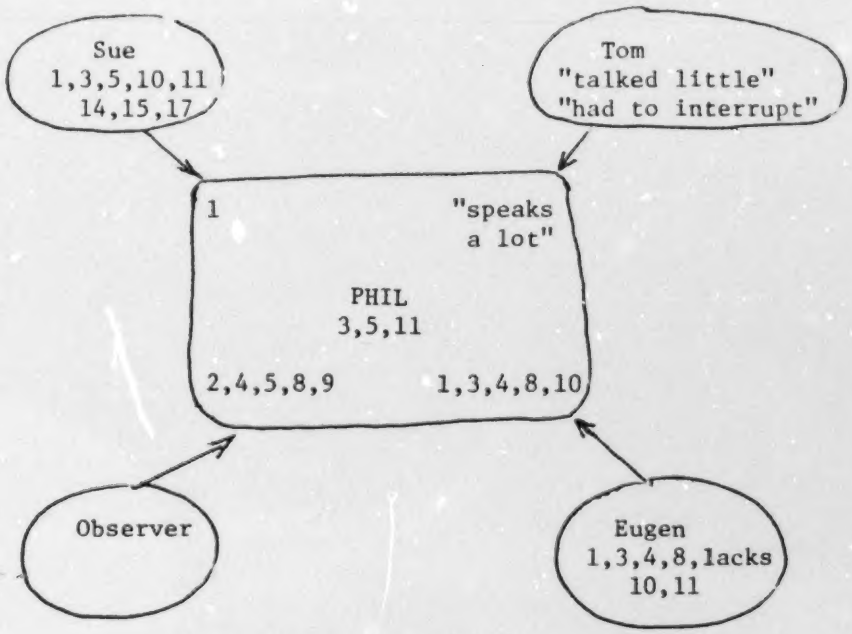


Table 2: Self- and other-perception - Phil

By contrast with the observer's codings of Phil (2, 4, 5, 8 and 9), Phil rates himself retrospectively as 3, 5 and 11. He notes that he is, and would like to remain "a moderator, a commentator". Eugen rates him as 1, 3, 4, 8 and 10; Sue gives him a 1; Tom just notes that "he spoke a lot." The transcription shows that he has a large range of group task and group maintenance functions, which confirms the codings by the observer and Eugen's ratings. He may be perceived, however, as exercising more leadership (function 1) than he sees himself doing.

Sue.

Codings by observer. In sample 11, Sue is given a 1, and in sample 12 a 8, for "giving feedback" or "showing with words that she is listening".

Participants' ratings. The perceptions of Sue's participation are schematized as follows.

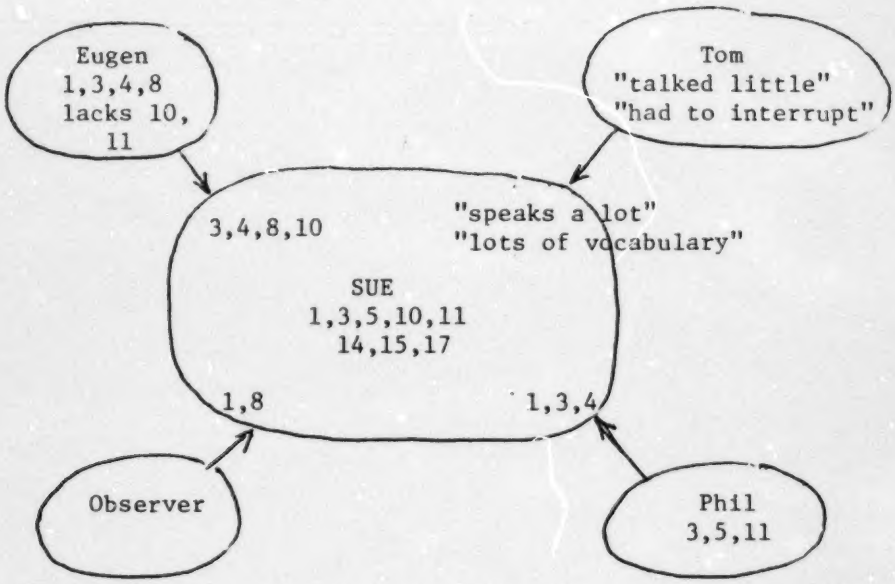


Table 3: Self- and other-perception - Sue

By contrast with the scanty observer's codings (1 and 8), Sue rates herself retrospectively as 1, 3, 5, a little of 10, 11, 14, 15, 17. "One of my problems she notes, was that I could only think of the French words." She is rated by Phil as 1, 3 and 4; by Eugen as 3, 4, 8 and 10, and by Tom as "speaking a lot and having a lot of vocabulary". It looks as if she was perceived as more proficient linguistically than she sees herself, and maybe more secure in her participation than she feels she is, as evidenced by her self-ratings 14, 15 and 17.

Tom.

Codings by observer. In sample 13, Tom is coded 8 for "acknowledging that he is listening", and his silence in sample 14 is interpreted by the observer as "listening to what the others have to say", or function 12.

Participants' ratings. Tom's participation as seen from a multiple perspective

is illustrated by the following schema:

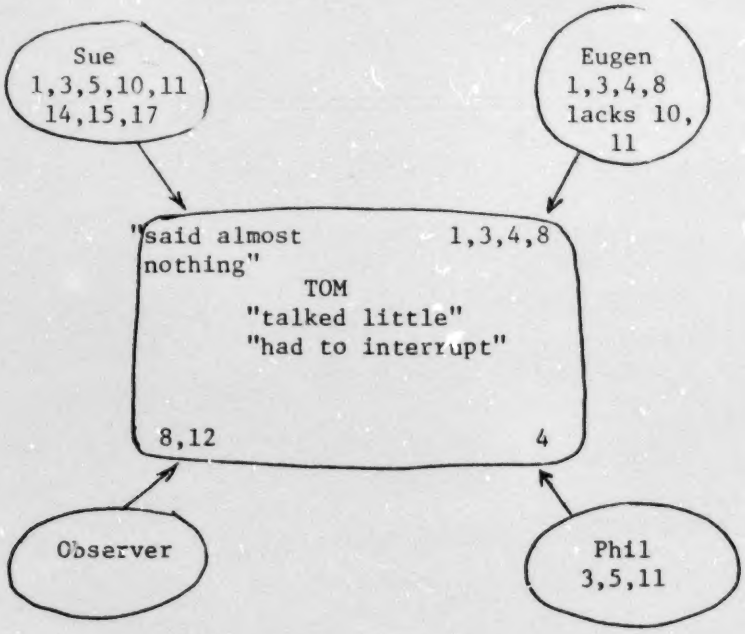


Table 4: Self- and other-perception - Tom

Whereas Tom is coded by the observer as 8 and 12, he rates himself retrospectively as "talking little" and "having always to interrupt". He is rated by Phil as 4, by Eugen as 1, 3, 4, and 8 (in fact, the same functions Eugen attributes to himself), and by Sue as "having said almost nothing". In sum, Tom's participation is viewed very differently by each participant. He sees himself in a much less active role than do the others. His linguistic difficulties make him underestimate the feedback (function 8) that he gives the others and limit the functional options that he sees as available to him. This in part may be due to the fact that he has a much less differentiated view of what's going on, than the others, and he is less capable than others to focus on functions and goals. He seems to value "talking a lot" and considers "interrupting" to be a regrettable behavior.
Tom's assessment illustrates the frequent dilemma of learners in a classroom setting: faced with the perceived expectations to "talk a lot", they lack the management skills necessary to take turns without interrupting, i.e., without adopting a behavior which they perceive as inappropriate.

Discussion.

The frequent discrepancies between the observers' codings and the participants' retrospective ratings illustrate the complexity of interpreting discourse phenomena. The reality which is coded for single utterances in the course of the conversation is not quite the same as the global perception participants have after the event. The observation of a videotape of that same discussion would possibly yield yet another perception of the group's interaction. Therefore, what is of interest for learners is not to search for a "true" account of what happened, but to negotiate an understanding of the various perspectives.

It seems that the participants' ratings of others were in part determined by their self-perception. For example, Eugen gave Tom the very same ratings he gave himself, despite the marked contrast seen by the observer between the two participants. Tom found that Phil and Sue "talked a lot", by contrast to his "talking little".

Moreover, the ability to differentiate among various functions and to reflect on the processes of the interaction seems related to the amount of control a learner has over his own and others' discourse. Tom, who felt he had the least control over the interaction, was also least capable of metacommunicative differentiation. His assessment was restricted to quantitative judgments such as "talking a lot" vs. "talking little".

Repairs

Let us examine now how observer 3 coded the repairs of errors and breakdowns in communication for each group member (see Observation Sheet 3 in Appendix).

Eugen
Sample 15:

E. ich glaube daß wir meistens 90% auf die Bildungswesen (12") spendieren sollten	E. I think that we should (12") spend mostly 90% on education

Sample 16:

E. als die der Industrismus Industrie zum Europa kam	E. when industrism industry came to Europe

Sample 17:

E. die Arbeiten waren nicht sehr (7") help me	E. the workers were not very (7") help me
P. gesund	P. healthy
E. gesund	E. healthy

Philip
Sample 18:

P. aber ah die Bildungswesen, diese Leute die ah in die Schule sind, sie werden nicht für 12 Jahre oder 10 Jahre oder so (...) ah sie müssen 10 Jahre in die Schule sein ah bevor sie arbeiten können	P. but ah education, these people who ah are in school, they will not ah for 12 or 10 years or so (...) they must be in school 10 years before they can work

Sample 19:

P. nein die Kunst (...) die Industrie. Kunst schaut wie sagt man emotions die Bewegungen des der	P. no the arts (...) industry. Art shows how do you say emotions - the movements of the the
E. [Empfindungen	E. [emotions
P. [Leute	P. [people

Sue
Sample 20:

S. ja und was sagt das ? daß 12% können lesen aber lesen ist nicht viel sie hm probablement	S. yes and what does it say ? that 12% can read but read is not much they hm probablement
S. ja und auch einige Programme brauchen viel viel Geld im beginning und später nicht so viel	S. yes and also some programs need a lot a lot of money in the beginning

Sample 21:

S. man braucht die Elektrizitätswerke und dann muß man nur sie maintain ich weiß nicht die Worte	S. you need the power plants and then you only need to maintain them - I don't know the word
P. aber wir können nicht alles (...)	P. but we can't put everything (...)

Sample 22:

E. ich glaube daß wir meistens 90% auf die Bildungswesen (12") spendieren sollten	E. I think we should spend mostly 90% on education
S. 90% ?	S. 90% ?

Sample 23:

P. wir können nicht die ganze Land der Elektrizität geben in einem Jahr	P. we cannot give the whole country electricity in one year
S. ja oh ja	S. yes oh yes
P. [nein ich glaube wir können nicht soviel	P. [no I think we cannot build so much
→ S. [ja I mean ja ich weiß es	S. [yes I mean yes I know
P. Industrie in einem Jahr bilden	P industry in one year
→ S. ja ich sage ja ich weiß, daß wir das nicht in einem Jahr tun	S. yes I say yes I know that we cannot do that in one year

Tom

Sample 24:

T. ich glaube daß die Bildugnswesen und ah die Sozialprogramme sind die	T. I think that education ah and ah the social programs are the most
→ wichs wichs wichtiger	most more important

Sample 25:

T. ich glaube eh daß eh zuerst man muß die Leute ah (1") healthy (laughs)	T. I think ah that ah first one must ah the people (1") healthy (laughs)
P. ja sie sie können nicht krank sein	P. yes they they cannot be sick

Sample 26:

T. wir müssen so so soziale Programme und ah Verkehrswege to ah zu ah eine national (5") you know (1") feeling (1") so that (1") so daß die Leute kann hm besser leben	T. we must so so social programs and ah transportation to ah to ah a national (5") you know (1") feeling (1") so that (1") so that the people can hm live better

Sample 27:

T. kann man das Straßenbahn nach man kann also auch das Telefon (4") wenn man will (8")	T. can you the streetcar to so you can also the telephone (4") if you want (8")

Observations

Problems encountered by Eugen. In sample 15, the observer noted that Eugen germanicized English words and coded this as "uncorrected error". In sample 16, the error was coded as "self-corrected vocabulary error". In sample 17, Eugen was seen as having a vocabulary problem, for which he requested help from Phil.

Problems encountered by Phil. Sample 18 showed a "self-corrected vocabulary problem" and sample 19 a "vocabulary problem", with Eugen giving the requested help. It is not clear, in fact, whether Phil really requested help or not, since he finishes his sentence at the very same time as the help is offered; his request for help might only have been rhetorical. Yet the observer coded this as "request for help".

Problems encountered by Sue. Samples 20 and 21 are coded by the observer as "use of French or English words", "uncorrected", or "self-corrected". It is interesting to note in 21 that the observer codes an admission of lexical deficiency as a self-repair. Like Phil's rhetorical request for help mentioned above, face-saving strategies are coded by the observer as repairs. Sample 22 is coded as a "request for clarification", which Sue herself possibly meant as a comment. Sample 23 is coded as "misunderstanding, self-corrected by alternate phrasing".

Problems encountered by Tom. Tom was observed in sample 24 to have some grammatical problems, which he self-corrected. He was coded in sample 25 to have vocabulary difficulties, which received unrequested repair in the form of a paraphrase by Phil. In sample 26, he was noted to make use of English words, that were either corrected or uncorrected. Sample 27 was coded as "both vocabulary and grammar error, uncorrected, long silence".

Discussion

Several conclusions can be drawn from the above observations, concerning both the repair behavior of the participants, and the coding practices of the observer. Whereas Eugen, Phil and Sue either explicitely requested help or used face-saving strategies that were perceived as requests for help or self-repair, Tom was never observed requesting help explicitely. When he did receive unsolicited help, he neither acknowledged it nor used it, as we can see in sample 26, which directly follows sample 25 and overlaps with Phil's turn. He is busy retrieving single words from his mother-tongue stock and draws linguistically little help from the communicative context, such as words or structures already used by others.

From the samples above, which include all the repairs coded for the 15 minute conversation, it appears that the observer was able to detect only lexical difficulties. He never picked up problems of pronunciation and rarely grammatical errors. Topic misunderstandings due to lack of vocabulary, if serious enough, were ignored and coded as simple "lack of vocabulary". Moreover, it seems that

the observer could not pay attention to both errors in form (low-inference events) and higher level breakdowns in communication (high-inference events). This became clear toward the end of the conversation, when Eugen wanted to use the arts for what he called "propaganda", namely to educate the people to democracy, and was misunderstood by the others as advocating communist totalitarianism ! There were no observer's notes on this portion of the exchange.

Conclusion

The pilot study described here suggests that adult learners at the intermediate level are able to observe and evaluate their interaction in group work. The interactional metalanguage in L_2 seems to be linguistically accessible to learners. It permits a process-oriented discussion that can easily take place in the target language, provided the terminology remains concrete enough and the students have been exposed to it first in their native language. The multiple perspective on the same events can make the students aware of the relative value of their assessments and can set the tone for a non-judgmental evaluation of the activity.

The ability of the learners to focus on process seems determined, however, by the amount of control they perceive themselves as having over the group's discourse. If one of the key elements in the control of discourse is mastery of its interactional features, then this study shows that reflexion on these features could yield important benefits , particularly in the three following areas:

1) It could help learners view their performance in the light of the short and long term, implicit or explicit goals they have set for themselves. Diversifying the description of the learners' performance could help them refine and diversify their perception of their goals.

2) A greater qualitative differentiation of tasks and functions in discourse may help reduce the anxiety of learners in the naturally competitive environment

of the classroom.

3) The observation of the variety of discursive behaviors adopted by their peers can broaden the options of learners in group work. For example, they can assess and compare the conversational mileage obtained by taking short and frequent turns-at-talk vs. longer and infrequent ones; the pragmatic value of fulfilling group maintenance vs. individual or group task functions; the discursive yield of explicitely requesting help vs. meeting implicit needs on one's own. Putting, so to speak, "the cards on the table" can help learners deal with one of the most difficult challenges of learning a language in a classroom setting: the delicate balance each learner must strike between furthering the content of his/her own learning and, at the same time, maintaining the group's interaction without which this learning cannot take place.

This study is currently being followed up by a contrastive study of learners' interactional behavior in their mother tongue and in the foreign language and by a study over time of the effect of an explicitely process-oriented syllabus on the development of interactional competence in the classroom.

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APPENDIX

Observation Sheet 1

Turn-Taking

Each member of a group tends to participate in the group's activity in a specific manner. Observe and note the way in which each participant takes turns. Since the conversation is likely to roll on fairly quickly, you will not be able to note down everything. Just jot down as many observations as you can, using the grid below.

Observe how each participant takes his/her turn:

1. How often does s/he take a turn-at-talk ?
2. Whom does s/he address (one person ? several ? speaks to him/herself ?)
3. After whom does s/he speak ?
4. Interruptions ?

Members of the group: ....

A. Single observations

Participant	Taking turns	Addressee	After whom ?	Interruptions

B. Synthesis: Individual patterns of participation

Observation Sheet 2

Topic Management

Observe and note the strategies used by the participants to manage the topic of the conversation.

a) Strategies for fulfilling the group task

for example:

1 suggest ideas, bring in facts, give opinion
2 think out loud
3 make countersuggestions
4 comment
5 summarize/organize
6 make procedural remarks

b) Strategies for helping group maintenance

for example:

7 elaborate on ideas of others
8 give feedback (acknowledge, evaluate)
9 check understanding (request clarification, confirm, repeat)
10 help others clarify (offer word/sentence, restate)
11 encourage others to contribute
12 eavesdrop
17 try in vain to take a turn
18 show that one is not interested in the activity

Members of the group: ....

A. Single observations

Participant	What was said (verbatim)	Strategy used

B. Synthesis: Individual patterns of topic management

Observation Sheet 3
Repairs

Each member of a group solves problems of communication in his/her own way. Observe and note the type of errors made, as well as misunderstandings, and what people said.

a) Linguistic errors

- nature of error: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation

- who makes the repair:

  . no correction (silence - error overlooked)
  . self-correction by speaker
  . requested/unrequested repair by listener

- how are repairs made:

  . use of English words, germanicized English words, other foreign words.
  . use of synonyms, paraphrase, completion of sentences by the listener

b) Misunderstandings

- how are they repaired:

  . request for clarification
  . alternate phrasing
  . completion of sentence

Members of the group: ....

A. Single observations

Ppt.	Error (What was said?)	Who repaired?	How repaired?	Misunderstanding (what was said?)	How repaired ? By whom ?

B. Synthesis: Individual patterns of repair